

# Alternative Medicine in the Muslim and Christian communities of Lower Galilee

Last Friday we joined a group called (direct translation from Hebrew) “Green Head” on a trip to the Galilee to explore the theme of alternative medicine in the Arab/Beduin communities of lower Galilee. Green Head is known for their themed tours of Israel being informative, innovative and socially stimulating trips. These are the kind of trips that only Israelis would take to explore topics of interest while touring this beautiful land and spending time with like folks (mostly retired professionals, artists, academics) who consider themselves (whether or not they are) part of the Israeli intelligentsia. We came along for the ride as we were truly intrigued by the theme of the trip.

At first it may not be entirely intuitive to understand why retired “old folks” like us would be interested in the topic of alternative medicine.



This was quickly resolved as most people in this age group are suffering from a variety of ailments. Some are legitimate illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, arthritis etc., but most others are simply the (some time chronic) aches and pains that are mostly related to our “circa”. We all

use too many traditional medications, in all colors and shades and we are all in search of the magic potion that will restore our crackling bodies to their youthful glory.



The trip was guided by Muhamed Krakara a school principal in the village of Arba, who has been studying the traditions of alternative medicine for many years. On this trip Muhamed took us to meet and to listen to the stories of some traditional healers and examine their secret natural medications (potions?) and hopefully understand the alternative medicine methods of the Bedouin and Israeli Arab (both Muslim and Christians) communities of northern Israel.



Our first stop was at a popular traditional clinic in the Beduin village of Al-Chalef (near the Israeli town of Kiriati Tivon). There we met Samira. She is a highly reputable healer who diagnoses, treats and prescribes natural medication to her patients. Their ailments may vary from aches and pains, to migraines to fertility and erectile dysfunctions. Samir learned her “trade” from her mother and continues the tradition of natural healing that has been passed on from generation to generation in the Bedouin community. In fact we were allowed to watch her diagnose and treat one of the women on our trip complaining about back aches. The jury is still

out as to whether or not her treatment was effective but it was surely a form of alternative medicine in so far as the method, the ambiance and the diagnosis was concerned.



On this stop we learned an interesting fact that not all people in Israel know let alone Israeli tourists like ourselves: There are no nomad Bedouins in Northern Israel. The entire community of a few hundred thousand is all settled in permanent housing (mostly new, modern and architecturally attractive) and are no longer as traditionally thought off just raising flocks of sheep. In fact the villages are modern communities with shops, stores, banks, restaurants which like in any other locale create employment and fosters entrepreneurship. Many others are working in Israeli towns in a wide variety of occupations. We also understand that the standard of education is very reasonable including access to vocational and higher learning institutions. This by the way is not the situation in southern Israel where the Bedouin community is facing many challenges and as we understand it is also contributing to illegal drug trade and arms smuggling.



Our second stop was at the home of another traditional healer in the village of Zarzir (near the Israeli kibbutz of Nahalal). He is a young man in his late twenties or early thirties who continues the tradition and has taken over the practice of his late father. His father who passed away at a relatively young age of 64 served in one of the elite commando units of the IDF and who apparently discovered a previously unknown plant that grows only in the northern Sinai desert. From this plant he produced a potion which, according to highly reputable sources, has some (almost magical) healing power mainly for migraines and muscle and joints pain. We bought a couple of bottles for our daughter, our eldest grandchild and our daughter-in-law who are chronic migraine sufferers. We hope that it works but even if it did not it is not going to cause any harm as this is an external treatment – so why not?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BjegDdrkJw>





Our third stop was at a Christian Arab village in the home of this family that produces pure honey and a few bee producing by-products we never heard of before. They explained to us that their honey from their family bee hives located in the near forest is absolutely sugar free and the honey and some of the by-products have some specific healing qualities. We did not buy any honey as one of us is a diabetic but many others did and contributed to the local economy. This is the land of milk and honey and we learnt from some of the accidental bee experts in our group more than we needed to know about the (birds) and the bees. It is a well-known fact that honey has many health contributing qualities therefore very little selling was required.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdRzyoQfXHo>

As a change of pace we visited two small relatively primitive olive oil producing operations. This area of the Galilee was described by our guide as “the most dense (in terms of trees per square mile) olive growing area in the world”. We had a chance to watch a fully automated little olive oil producing “factory” and within a few meters down the road a traditional albeit somewhat mechanized, olive oil producing process that dates back centuries. Many of the village habitants own family olive groves and at this time of year family members from little children to older family member are out picking the olives and hauling them to one of the two oil producing factories. Within a few minutes they walk away with what our guide hailed as the purest and of course best (Syrian) olive oil.





# المعصرة الحديثة بيت הבד המודרני



عصر على  
الطريقة الحديثة  
وعلى الحجر

נבילה שלטא  
האצלה והילנה



052-3290459 محمد السمينة وأولاده  
052-3713000 خليل خطيب



By now its lunch time and in addition to the traditional (Israeli/Arab) food we were treated to a unique experience.



In Muslim weddings amongst other aspects of the lavish ceremony it is traditional to have (generally two) song writers/singers as part of the wedding procession. This is a unique form of song writing and singing as it is entirely spontaneous and improvisational. In other words these troubadours create the lyrics on the spot using different linguistic techniques that were expertly demonstrated by Khadia, one of the most popular song writer/singer in the Israeli Arab community. For Western folks unfamiliar with Muslim customs this may be analogous to improvised hip hop lyrics sung to a familiar beat. I hope that by making this analogy we did not belittle or cheapen this beautiful tradition.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCL0528VRT4>

Our trip ended at the home of what can best be described as a modern day witch doctor. This man claims that he has the power to diagnose and through some special prayers and weird rituals cure people who were either cursed, are under negative spell or are victims of an evil eye. (I am not kidding).



Of course we are all familiar with the practice of the Haitian Voodoo or the Brazilian Macumba, this is as close to it with the exception of the costumes, masks and icons.

Hebrew speaking readers are invited to listen to his diagnosis of one of the three volunteers from our group.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUCTxAexyH0>

I am not a witch doctor but I could probably come up with similar generalities if the price was right. On the bus on our way back to Tel-Aviv our guide explained that the purpose of the session we just witnessed was not for us to believe but rather to understand that this form of witch craft actually exists and according to him is mostly prevalent in Northern Africa (e.g. Lybia) as well as in Egypt. At the same time he assured us citing personal knowledge and specific anecdotes that we should not fall for this B.S we just witnessed. According to him this witch doctor (dressed as a modern businessman) is nothing short of a con man preying on desperate people who are predisposed to believe in this nonsense. Frankly this qualification was redundant as even we who are reasonably gullible people did not buy it.

It was a wonderful trip. We saw some of the most beautiful scenery that the Galilee has to offer. We saw places and met people that most would not bother to visit and learned the obvious: people are people everywhere. They want the same things, they do good things they do bad things they love their families and they rather be left alone to live a decent life and the hell with the politics. In response to a question Muhamed shared his opinion as to the feelings of the Arab minority in Israel: “ as long as you do not confiscate our land and as long as you treat us as equal citizens of Israel, we are cool”. This may be one man’s opinion but it’s worth listening to.



Israeli town just across from the Arab village - co-existence?



1 note



**amnonzohar**

Our tiny little pitzy pitzy apartment in Tel-Aviv